WILLIAM L. WEISS
CHICAGO COUNCIL, BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

DISTINGUISHED CITIZEN AWARD

JOHN M. BUCHANAN
PASTOR FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO

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Responsibility — is what we are here to recognize and celebrate this evening.

Those who despair about the future of our society, and its prospects, often do so because they see a steady diminishing of a sense of personal responsibility. Some look at us and see a new narcissism, a turning inward, away from society's major problems to the individual's private and more manageable ones. Some see a politics of blame that places responsibility for all societies' ills on someone else; big business, big government, big labor. Psychologists see us retreating into a "feel good" world of self discovery, self actualization, self expression.

But every now and then, scattered throughout our culture are wonderful exceptions to that trend: individual men and women marching to a different and older drummer; doing things not because they have to, or because it will enhance individual wealth or corporate profits, but doing things quietly and steadily because they need doing; because if no one does them we, our culture, our nation, our community become measurably poorer.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, exiled from the former Soviet Union said "Mankind's sole salvation lies in everyone making everything his business."

William L. Weiss — does things because they need doing, makes a lot of things his business. We are all better for it and so it is a privilege to recognize and honor him this evening.

His resume is long and distinguished. And two-thirds of the material in it falls into the category of Bill making a lot of things his business.

He is, of course, Chairman of Ameritech. He is a major decision maker, manager and visionary - translate that "leader" in a communications industry which is helping to create a new and hopeful future for our shrinking planet. It has been his love, one of them at least, since 1951 when he joined Bell of Pennsylvania. He rose through Wisconsin Telephone, Indiana Bell, Illinois Bell and when Ameritch opened for business in 1984 Bill Weiss was Chairman and CEO.

He has shared his gifts of leadership and vision with others as a director of Abbott Laboratories, Inc., Merrill Lynch, Quaker Oats and Tenneco.

And he has invested that same strong leadership in our community.

He chairs the Governance Board of the Central Area Circulator; serves as Trustee for Northwestern University, the Committee for Economic Development, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Lyric Opera of Chicago. The list of his involvements in this community goes on and on and is a litany of responsible love.

And he has been recognized by his Alma Mater, Penn State University — receiving its Outstanding Alumnus and Distinguished Alumni Awards. He has been recognized by the University of Wisconsin, Purdue, DePaul and Knox College with awards and honorary degrees; by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Chicago's Industrial League, Chicago Junior Achievement.

He does love that University of Pennsylvania and the mountains of Pennsylvania! He and Jo belong to my church and after the service on Sunday morning they always take time to stop and say hello, and in the fall I can always determine the fortunes of the Nittany Lions by the spring in Bill's step. And on very rare occasions I can tell when things have not gone so well.

Responsibility — a marriage of 43 years, a monument these days of grace and forgiveness and love. Three children — all of whom seem to like him. . . no small achievement either . . . and talk to him and spend time with him. You might even think they respect, admire and love him. Two grandchildren — the only free lunch he is ever likely to receive. . . .

I've done a little research actually. He is, as you know a private man, not given to self-disclosure. Although every time I turn on Channel 11 there are Bill and Jo at a White House concert, trying, with great determination, to look like they are having fun, while those of us who know a bit about his political leanings know Bill would like to hide under the table. . . .

In any event, there is an incident recorded, I am assured, in the archives of the Boy Scout Troop in Big Run, Pennsylvania in the 1940s. Big Run I can assure you is not very big. Bill and I — Jo and Sue for that matter, all come from Western Pennsylvania. He and I share a blue collar Western Pennsylvania heritage. Ever notice how people from Western Pennsylvania say John? Bill and I knew where each other were from before we knew names. In any event, Scout Weiss, from blue collar Big Run, led his troop in a camporee — a kind of annual competition between all the troops in a district, based on camping skills. I recall a camporee in Pennsylvania as one of the three or four worst nights in my life: in a cold downpour, with water coming in the tent and the fire out and everything submerged in three inches of mud and our leader wanting us to look good.

Well — the Big run troop was a little less than spit and polish: their pots and pans didn't match; their equipment was not freshly ordered from the official scout catalog, but was probably donated by parents or liberated from their kitchen cabinets. In any event, it was not a pretty site. The campsite inspector was a Senior Scout from an affluent troop that did have matching pots and pans and new uniforms, and he made clear his disdain for this shabby scene he was inspecting and failed Weiss's troop, suggesting that if things improved upon his return he might be persuaded to be more generous.

When he returned later, the archives reveal, the boys from Big Run, led by Scout Weiss — threw him unceremoneously into the creek . . . Leadership! Initiative! Creativity!

Bill has combined commitment to his company, his community, his family and his church in a way that serves as model for all of us and contradicts the current wisdom that you cannot do it all. He has. . . .

His commitment to his wife and children was always clear. He was present and available, participating in important activities with Sue, Steve and Dave, earning, I am told, a reputation as a campfire cook specializing in hamburger helper. He served as a Sunday School teacher and Sunday School superintendent. . . .

He has served as Trustee of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago and has added his leadership and wisdom to that institution as well.

What makes a city great? Great architecture, championship sports, world class art and music; but there's something else. Vaclav Havel spoke to the U. S. Congress as Czechoslovakia threw off the yoke of totalitarianism and said —

> "The salvation of this human world lies no where else than in the human heart — in human responsibility . . . Responsibility to something higher — to the order of being where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where and only where they will be properly judged."

Thank you, Bill — and Jo — for showing us what that means. Thank you for your energy, leadership, vision and hard work. Thank you for your responsibility.

It is my honor now to present William L. Weiss — the recipient of the Chicago Council of the Boy Scouts of America 1994 Distinguished Citizen Award.